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# Personal Branding and Employee Advocacy in Finnish Companies

Is Personal Branding and Employee Advocacy beneficial?

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<p>The objective of this thesis is to determine if companies can benefit from employee advocacy and personal branding; how can they benefit from it and if there are any negative sides to it. The research is limited specifically to Finnish companies.</p> <p>A literature review was conducted to gain an overview of how marketing and branding has evolved until this year and to help understand how employee advocacy and personal branding can be used in companies and to see what benefits and disadvantages they have. To understand how they could be used in Finnish companies, a qualitative research method was conducted with a Finnish company to gain insight on the Finnish market.</p> <p>The results of the study showed that both employee advocacy and personal branding, if done properly, is beneficial for Finnish companies. There are certain risks for companies when adapting the methods, but with management and training the risks can be minimised.</p> <p>The principal conclusion was that Finnish companies can benefit from personal branding and employee advocacy and that they should adapt it into their marketing strategies, if they have not already.</p>	
Keywords	Marketing, Personal Branding, Employee Advocacy

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## 1 Introduction

The digital age and the new technologies brought with it, have changed the world of marketing and branding for companies as well as for consumers. Companies rely highly on the consumers and their behaviour. This means that companies must understand and adapt with the consumers' behaviour of following new trends and technologies. Nowadays the phenomenon leading marketing and branding is social media. Now, social media is the quickest way to contact companies target markets as well as the best place to build the company image and become a known brand.

The thesis topic is personal branding and employee advocacy in Finnish companies. Personal branding means creating a feeling that you want consumers to experience when seeing the brand or hearing something about it. A person can have a personal brand helping to apply for jobs but companies can use either employees to create personal brands to match their company values and show it to the consumers or hire people who have strong personal brands to work as a "face" for the company such as celebrities. Employee advocacy means having employees working as the "face" of the company, posting and sharing on social media channels things that are important to the company. (Deckers, A, Lacy K 2011)

This topic was chosen because both employee advocacy and personal branding are new phenomena in Finland, yet the subject is broad and very known around the world, especially in the USA. Both employee advocacy and personal branding open new opportunities for companies for marketing purposes but also for creating a stronger brand and company image. It is also beneficial for the employees, as it allows them to be in the team moulding the company's image and allows them to learn more about social media, expand their connections and bring out their own skills.

This Thesis discusses the changes marketing and branding has gone through as well as the benefits and negative sides of these new concepts. An interview with Finnmatkat, a Finnish travel agency, was conducted to gain more insight from the company point of view. The aim of this thesis is to see if Finnish companies can benefit from employee advocacy and personal branding. The material used for this thesis is literature as well as an interview with Finnmatka's social media expert, Anni Aarni,

The thesis material is gathered from Finnmatka's point of view, however these topics are crucial nowadays for other Finnish companies that are renewing their marketing and branding strategies. The methods companies use might vary but the aim is the same; to strengthen the company image and brand.

## **1 Literature review**

In order to answer if employee advocacy and personal branding are beneficial, it is first important to review the theories around the concepts, in particular marketing and branding theories as they are both part of these concepts.

### **1.1 Overview of Marketing and Branding**

#### **2.1.1 Marketing**

"Marketing is managing profitable customer relationships. The basic objective is to attract new customers by guaranteeing and offering the customers superior value as well as to retain and grow current customer bases by continuously delivering satisfaction" (Kotler, Armstrong 2012).

The American Marketing Association also describes marketing as the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for the customers, clients, partners and the whole society (2013).

Broadly defined, marketing is a social and managerial practice where individuals and organisations get what they need and want by exchanging value with others. Narrowly defined, marketing in the business context means building profitable exchange relationships with customers. Linking these together, we get the definition that marketing is the process where companies exchange relationships in order to gain value from the customers in return (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)

The concept of Marketing is broad and includes various steps. Kotler's explanation of the core concepts is the following;

1. First fully understand the consumers and their needs, wants and demands as well as the marketplace.

2. Design a customer-driven marketing strategy.
  - a. Select a customer base to segment and target.
  - b. Decide on value proposition: differentiation and positioning.
3. Construct an integrated marketing program that delivers superior value.
  - a. Design the product and building strong brands.
  - b. Figure out the pricing.
  - c. Distribution; managing demand and supply chains.
  - d. Promotion.
4. Build profitable relationships and creating delight for the customers. (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)



Figure 1. Simple model of the Marketing Process (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)

In return organisations can capture value from customers to create profits and customer equity; creating satisfied, loyal customers, capturing customer lifetime value and increasing share of market and share of customer.

The basics of marketing work around the Marketing Mix. The Marketing Mix is a toolkit that marketers use to implement their marketing plan. It is commonly known as the 4Ps, an approach proposed by Jerome E. McCarthy. The 4Ps consist of product, promotion, price and place. (Figure 2) (R.Masterson & D.Prokton 2014)



Figure 2. The 4Ps of the Marketing Mix (R.Masterson & D.Prokton 2014)

However, the dominance of service products and the importance of the service elements of physical products changed the Marketing Mix. The more preferred framework nowadays is the 7Ps, proposed by Bernard Booms and Mary Jo Bitner. The 7Ps adds physical evidence, people and process to the 4Ps. (Figure 3) (R.Masterson & D.Prokton 2014)

Each P covers a range of marketing ideas and theories. A product is not just a bought product; it includes packaging, supporting services that shape the customers' buying decision. All Ps must fit each other, if the Ps are out of sync the whole offered product is devalued. For example, an everyday shampoo should do its job reliably, be inexpensive and must be widely available. (R.Masterson & D.Prokton 2014)





Figure 3. The 7Ps of the Marketing Mix. (R.Masterson & D.Prokton 2014)

### 2.1.2 Branding

A key marketing concept that is even older than marketing itself is branding. Branding concentrates specifically on the perceived image of a product or service.

Branding is part of marketing yet its origin goes far into history. The term Branding comes from the old Norse “brandr”, which meant to burn. This term carried itself into Anglo-Saxon and was used as a term to describe stamping the ownership on one’s livestock. It was not only used to distinguish livestock from the neighbours but also for trading purposes; trade buyers would use brands as means to distinguish between the cattle of one farmer to another. A farmer with a good reputation would find his brand more sought after, while the one with the lesser reputation were to be avoided. Hence the utility of brands as a guide to choice was established (Keller 2008) (Walters 2014).

Branding is still used in similar ways but is nowadays a marketing practice that requires creating a name, symbol, packaging design etc., that identifies and differentiates a product or service from another (Keller 2008)

A brand is an intangible, legally protected asset that brings value to the organisation. It is how the whole organisation or the product or service itself is perceived by the customers and target audience. However, a brand is much more than a logo or a name; it is a whole customer experience (the sum of the marketing mix and communications mix from the products to the customer service, and packaging to advertising). In overall, a brand is everything the consumer sees, feels and experiences about the product or service. (P.R Smith, Ze Zook 2011)

By having a weak brand or no brand at all, the companies have a disadvantage in the market. Nowadays if a product or service doesn't have a strong and unifying brand, its' presence becomes weak and is seen differently. A weakened brand is less recognisable and therefore less trusted and ultimately customers will see it as a risk full purchase. (P.R Smith, Ze Zook 2011)

#### **2.1.2.1 How do companies benefit from branding?**

If organisations have strong brands, they can benefit from gaining a sustainable competitive advantage, boosting customer relationships, bringing sales and boosting profits. (P.R Smith, Ze Zook 2011)

Brands can help differentiate an organisation's product or service and help them stand out from competitors. Brands are seen often as the primary source of competitive advantage and is a highly valuable asset to the organisation. (P.R Smith, Ze Zook 2011)

Brands also help boost customer relationships as brands unconsciously create relationships between the brands and the consumer. All consumers use brands and usually create a connection towards the used brand. This might be unconscious but it leads to the consumer continuously choosing that brand because they know it provides what they want and as well as saves time as it is easier to find. A well created brand can create loyalty, trust and continuity between the consumer and the brand. Coca Cola is a well known example of customer loyalty; customers buy the drink because its

brand is as important to the customers as the taste is. There are various drinks with the same flavour but with less known brands, that have yet to manage to compete against Coca Cola Company. (P.R Smith, Ze Zook 2011)

The brand loyalty consumers' have also provides predictability and security of demand for the producer and creates barriers that makes it difficult for other companies to entre the market. (Keller 2008)

Brands are used to help customers by making their purchasing process easier. Brands are easier to recognise and associate with quality which brings safety into the purchasing decision. Strong brands also encourage repeat purchases that in turn boost sales. (P.R Smith, Ze Zook 2011)

Strong brands bring in profits to the organisations. Good brands can be sold with premium prices which results in increased profits, which allows for more money to be spent on better communications. This continuously strengthens a brand. (P.R Smith, Ze Zook 2011)

#### **2.1.2.2 How do customers benefit from brands?**

Customers, like organisations, benefit from brands. Brands save their time, reduce risk and allow to fulfil their aspirations. (Smith, Zook 2011)

Brands save time by helping the customers find the products and services quicker. A recognisable brand is easily found in the chaotic world. (Smith, Zook 2011)

A strong brand is also a guarantee or promise of consistency, quality, image and style. These are promises that are emitted through advertisements and that the consumers trust. (Smith, Zook 2011)

Brands give status and aspirations to the consumers; in some ways buying and consuming a brand can define who we are. Using certain brands can give the consumer a status and this is an aspect customers take into consideration. Some people buy certain brands because of the image it gives them; a Mercedes Benz brings an elegant and wealthy image to the owner when a Lamborghini gives the owner a sporty and wealthy image. (Smith, Zook 2011)

### **2.1.3 The changes in the marketing landscape**

Branding has overtime become part of the marketing process, and both have been through various changes in the past years. Everyday changes occur in the market place, forcing marketing practices to adapt. Major changes are uncertain economic environments, the digital age, rapid globalisation and the need for more ethics and social responsibility. (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)

The most drastic change that affected marketing is the digital age. The explosive growth in computer, communications, information and other digital technology has had a major impact on the ways companies can use marketing and branding. The constant innovation and fast paced technology changes has more or less forced companies to change their strategies. (Carranza, 2015) (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)

The digital age has opened up new ways of studying consumers and creating products and services that are more tailored to individuals. It has helped marketers communicate with customers in large groups or one-on-one. (Kotler, Armstrong, 2012)

Digital technology has opened up new ways of communication, advertising and relationship building tools such as online advertising, video-sharing tools, smartphones and apps as well as online social networks. The most used technology is the internet; allowing people and companies to connect through various platforms. This shift has forced companies also to soften their sales pitches and to provide social media listening tactics as well as customer service. (Kotler, Armstrong 2012) (Carranza 2015)

Web 1.0, which represents the development of the internet and websites, connected people with communication. Web 2.0 connected people with people and now, Web 3.0 puts all the information and the people connections together. To understand Web 3.0, it is necessary to understand why Web 2.0 came into the picture. ( O'Reilly, 2005)

Web 2.0 is a network platform that has various concepts, trends and technologies that all focus on the user collaboration, sharing of user-generated content and social networking. O'Reilly states that the change from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 happened because of the collapse of the hype of Web 1.0 in fall 2011. O'Reilly explains that when every hype slows down, a "shakeout" occurs; meaning pretenders operating drop out and the successful companies show their strength. During this change O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty noted that the web was more important than ever as new applications

and sites were being created frequently. O'Reilly and Dougherty organised a Web 2.0 conference and in one and half year the term "Web 2.0" had taken hold. (O'Reilly 2005)

Web 3.0 includes customised internet applications that can be accessed through multifunction mobile devices. This allows people to be constantly connected and is ideal for companies as they can access the target markets constantly. (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)

It is hard to find a company that isn't online nowadays because every successful company understands the necessity of having an online presence in order to gain and maintain a customer base. A company that isn't online will find it hard to market the brand profitably and find a loyal customer base. (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)



Figure 4. Setting up for online marketing (Kotler, Armstrong 2012)

Most companies use approaches showed above on figure 4. These approaches are basic and much be integrated with the rest of the promotion mix.

## 1.2 Digital Marketing

The internet and media as well as the new technologies have transformed businesses and marketing. With the majority of consumers online, some companies have required to shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing while some have adapted digital marketing techniques.

Digital marketing is the usage of the internet and related digital technologies in combination with traditional communications to achieve the company's marketing objectives. Simply defined, digital marketing can be described as achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

Digital marketing in theory should include the managing of different forms of online company presence such as company websites and social media pages combined with online communication techniques such as social media marketing and email marketing. These techniques are used to support the marketing objectives of obtaining new customers and providing services to already existing ones. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

For companies to actually benefit from digital marketing successfully they have to implement the digital marketing techniques with traditional media marketing such as print, TV and direct mail. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

A good digital strategy companies should have, requires understanding a more complex and competitive buying environment with customer journeys involving many different forms of online presence. For the strategy to reach and influence potential customers online, it is usual to refer to three main types of media channels marketers should consider. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

1. Paid media. Bought media where there is investment to pay for visitors, display ad networks. Offline, traditional media such as print and TV advertising remain important.
2. Earned media. Traditionally earned media consisted of publicity that was generated by public relations trying to increase the awareness of the brand. Now earned media also includes word-of-mouth that can be stimulated through viral and social media marketing as well as conversations in social networks, blogs and other communities.

3. Owned media. Media owned completely by the company. Online this includes the company's own websites, blogs, email-lists mobile applications and their presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Offline this can include brochures and retail stores.

For example, for marketing campaigns it is necessary for these three types of media to overlap as campaigns should run in various platforms, reaching as many potential clients as possible. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

There are also many ways to interact with potential audiences when they are online. Traditionally digital media channels were accessed via desktop or laptop based hardware systems and this had been dominant for many years. Nowadays however, mobile platforms have become more popular. Platforms that can be used for digital platforms are:

- Desktop and Laptop
- Mobile phones and tablets
- Other hardware platforms such as gaming platforms (Playstation, Xbox)

### **1.3 Digital branding**

As marketing evolved towards digital marketing, so has branding in particular with the advents of digital tools that can reach the consumers quicker.

Branding is important on and offline as it assists consumers differentiate between products and services. The main elements of brand values and brand strategy stay the same in traditional and digital branding but the methods and platforms used vary. In this chapter I will explain what digital branding is and how it can be used. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

In overall, digital branding is the personality of an organisation, service or product, created by the sum of all experiences a consumer has with that brand. (Rowles 2014)

Digital branding, just like traditional branding, isn't about logos or designs. It is about the sum of our experiences with the product or service. In online branding however, consumers become co-producers of value as they can contribute feedback through discussion groups to add value to a brand (Rowles 2014)

Successful online branding, like traditional branding, requires delivering of three aspects of a brand; rational values, emotional values and promised brand experience<sup>1</sup>. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

However, in digital branding two-way communication between the brands and the consumers can be easier than in traditional branding. Social Media plays a large role in this; allowing consumers to communicate straight with the brand and other consumers. Its more important what consumers say in social media than what the brand says; consumers in a way mould the brand. (Rowles 2014)

Rowles argues that traditional branding gave the consumers a shallow understanding of the brand and the company. This was reasoned on how in traditional branding the company only broadcasts about the brand and discussion between the consumer and organisation is impossible. It has been debated that digital media however would allow consumers to challenge, ask and question a brand resulting creating a truer picture of the brand. Essentially a brand is the personality of a service or product and digital media gives the consumers the possibility to understand the truer personality. Understanding the brand helps the consumers with the decision-making process, which shows the importance of a strong digital brand presence. (2014)

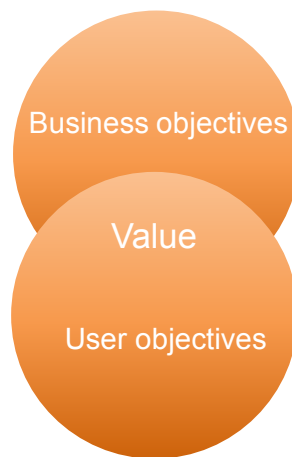


Figure 5. Aligned business objectives and target audience objectives create potential value. (Rowles 2014)

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<sup>1</sup> Brand experience is the frequency and depth of interactions with a brand that can be enhanced through the internet



Traditionally, when business objectives and target audience objectives overlap, value is created for both the business and target audience (see figure 5). A target audience is a specific group the company is targeting. According to Rowles, this created value is not enough in digital marketing as the value created is only potential value. Companies should give reason to want to engage and leave feedback rather than scratch the surface with the product or service. This is where digital branding helps to bridge the gap between the business objectives and target audiences' actual wants (see figure 6).



Figure 6. How digital marketing links user objectives and business objectives. (Rowles 2014)

However digital branding has also negative aspects for companies; most consumers nowadays are experienced internet resulting in the consumers doing online research about brands and their products and services. This can result in the consumer easily switching brands based on what she finds online. Other consumers' comments and feedbacks on brand pages have the highest impact on the decision making. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick 2008)

### **2.3.1 When building a digital brand**

The standard approach is to understand what the target audience is interested in and passionate about in order to fix the organisation's approach. After this, it is important to research what online channels reach the target market best and choosing the best ones. It is not necessary to tackle all channels; it is better to concentrate on a couple to

make sure that the content is valuable. With the channels chosen; start engaging with the target market and stimulate conversation. (Rowles, 2014)

When the channels are chosen, companies should start posting news, opinions, information relevant for their company brand. However, companies should also take time to re-post material that matches their image. (Rowles 2014)

There are various details that need to be taken into consideration when creating a digital brand. The majority of people are online via mobile phones nowadays which means all posts and images should be adapted to this platform as well. When posting online, it is necessary to check that it is compatible for mobile phone applications as well, other wise the content will lose its value. Another important point to consider is how much you post online; quality over quantity always, keeping in mind that people get annoyed with constant posting. (Rowles, 2014)

## **1.4 Personal Branding**

With the rise of digital marketing and the new opportunities the digital environment provides; there has been further development in personal branding. Personal branding has been around before the digital age but since the new online technologies personal branding has become easier and its importance in the business world has grown.

### **2.4.1 Overview of Personal Branding**

According to Decker and Lacy, personal branding means creating a feeling that you want the consumers to experience when hearing a name, seeing something online or in real life. All things that are published in the name of the brand should always fit the personal branding theme and guidelines. (2011)

Before the digital age, personal branding was used, however it was not as popular as it is nowadays. Before the internet's popularity skyrocketed, personal branding was done completely offline. To brand themselves, people would for example engage with traditional media; doing interviews with newspapers, magazines and TV shows and by doing face-to-face appearances by attending networking events and industry conferences that suited their brand. (The Young Entrepreneur Council, 2012)

Personal branding has become an essential part of entrepreneurship nowadays and is seen highly important. The creation of a strong personal brand allows others to think of your product or service when they think about the market. (Whitmore. J 2015)

A personal brand of a company employee can help paint a picture also of who the company is. If the employee shares the same values and visions with the company and agrees in the company image, the employee can transmit this through their own brand. This allows to show how the characteristics, from design, to the the appearance of employees, to how the company is run and works and everything in between. It results in how the company wants to see itself but the customers mould the results. (Whitmore J 2015)

Citröen states the four basic elements of a successful personal brand as the following:

1. Start with a strategy. First find out how others perceive the original brand and then think how it needs to be changed that people would think about the brand how you want and planned.
2. Credibility necessitates authentic values. Successful personal brands earn and build credibility. To be credible, you must start with conveying the values unique to the brand and then show it to the target audience. It is important that the brand lives up to its values rather than just informs about it.
3. Focus on the target audience. Personal branding requires a specific target market. The target markets physical and mental needs must be known.
4. Maintain an online presence. Customers often look online to gain more information on a product or service. It is important to keep all media platforms up to date. (Citröen Lida 2014)

Erik Deckers and Kyle Lacy however divide personal branding into five elements:

1. Finding one's own passion. It is important to have at least one passion, linked to something the branding is based on or known for.
2. Being brave. Self-promotion is seen sometimes as cockiness, however it is just a way of informing the target market about yourself and the organisation. The one doing personal branding must be brave and show their own personality and make their work interesting.
3. Telling your own story. This is what makes a person interesting and can help in gaining more followers in social media as well as hold on to the ones already following.
4. Creating relationships. The basis is to always treat everyone as new resources.

5. Starting the project immediately. The biggest step is to start with personal branding; start being active and post, blog, share status' frequently. (2011)

Personal branding is a crucial part of marketing in this digital age. Nowadays in the competitive market, it is more about differentiating, communication and creating demand. Having an impact seems to evolve around two-way communication; people want to see a person behind the brand, not a corporation. They want to be able to discuss, comment and get answers from the representatives in a timely manner. (Tolvanen 2015)

#### **2.4.2 How to build a personal brand**

In addition to the base of personal branding there are other actions needed in building a personal brand. This section will examine what has to be done when building a personal brand.

The first important part in building a personal brand is telling a story. This is what makes you unique and stand out in the market place. The personal story should start with a bibliography; who are you, what do you do and what you have and want to accomplish. The personal bibliography will help you start your personal brand story. All of your content; photos, posts, status updates, tweets, should centre on telling the story. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

According to Dan Schawbel there are four steps in branding yourself:

1. Discover. Think about the company and how it is being perceived now and then plan on how you want the company to be perceived and how you could achieve this. Decide on what you want the brand to say to the target market and competitors.
2. Create. After you have the initial idea on how you want your brand to be seen, decide on what channels you will use to access the target market. The channels should be chosen so that they match your brand identity. The main factor is that you choose some channels and concentrate on them, trying to tackle too many channels will bring more harm.
3. Communicate. Now that the brand personality is clear and the online platforms are chosen, it is crucial to use them to communicate with competition, targeted customers and influencers. Re-tweet and post interesting, on-topic, publications

and comment on them. This will bring the brand more coverage and show that you are not only about branding yourself.

4. Maintain. After everything is running, don't forget to be active on your chosen channels. (2014)

### **2.4.3 Pros and cons of personal branding**

The previous sections have explained what personal branding is and how it works. This section will examine the pros and cons of personal branding to see if it is a beneficial marketing strategy for companies.

Some argue that sales people find it more difficult to attract potential customers which would be a reason why personal branding is needed; people who do not want to talk to sales people might find it easier to trust personal brands that allow the consumers to follow the company and the consumers can find it easier to approach than a sales person. This can result in better sales. (Lintulahti 2014)

Personal branding also creates better customer service for the customers. Rather than having dull "faceless" customer service via phone lines or email, customers get to talk straight with an advocate. This gives more personality to the service. (Lintulahti 2014)

Personal branding also allows the target market to see the company as experts. With personal branding the company can show who it is, what it does and how it does it, allowing the customers to see the company as a whole. (Lintulahti 2014)

Personal branding makes a company look more interesting and creates a better employer image. This brings in young talents to apply for jobs and brings the company innovative and hard-working staff. (Lintulahti 2014)

On the other hand, it is also possible to have negative affects from personal branding. The employee creating a personal brand in the name of an organisation must live up to the brand created. The company as well as the appointed employee doing personal branding in the name of the company will lose credibility if the publishing is not consistent and true to the brand. (Manaher 2011)

Everything done and posted in the name of the company will stick in the minds of the consumers. All behaviour reflects on what the company is and stands for. The person responsible of personal branding in the name of an organisation should be vary on what to post yet should try not to loose personality. (Manaher 2011)

Personal branding also allows the risk of trying to spread out too much. It is necessary to concentrate on certain target audiences and create value for them. Spreading out too much makes it difficult to target specifically consumers. (Manaher 2011)

In the end, if the company decides to exclude personal branding from their marketing strategy, their actual brand might suffer. This is due to the fact that the consumers get used to this certain brand and when that is stripped off the company image can be seen differently. (Adamsson 2008)

In some situations, it is necessary to exclude personal brands from marketing strategies to save the company image. Companies that have celebrities and their personal brands promoting the company products take a high risk. An example of this is Kobe Bryant and McDonald's and Coca Cola. Famous basketball player Kobe Bryant and his brand was used to advertise McDonald's and Coca Cola in the US. In year 2003 Bryant was accused of sexual assault leading in the companies to release statements and dropping him immediately to show the consumers that they do not tolerate this behaviour. Bryant brought negative visibility for the companies. Another case where using celebrity personal brands can backfire is if it comes out to the public that the celebrity does not use the products endorsed. This creates disbelief in the media and consumers loose trust in the company. (Levine, 2003) (D.Smith 2009)

## **1.5 Employee advocacy**

Over the years personal branding has been used by companies. Now companies have employees representing the company brand through their own actions and personalities instead of a single person or founder of the company. This is called Employee Advocacy and this chapter will explain what it is as well as it's pros and cons. To gain insight on a topic this new, this chapter includes reviews from companies that operate in employee advocacy.

### 2.4.1 Overview of Employee Advocacy

Before the age of internet, there were traditional ways of creating employee advocates. Some offline ways of creating advocates were; Giving employees products with the company name or logo, having company activities and get-togethers that create conversation and employee incentivisation. Offline advocacy is seen less important nowadays. (Wasyluk 2015)

Now in the digital time, employee advocacy is the promotion of a firm's brand by its own employees. It is not only promoting but believing in the mission, vision and values of the company. The advocates should emit the personality of one who seeks for opportunities to start discussions on social networks with competitors and target customers. (Hingemarketing 2015)

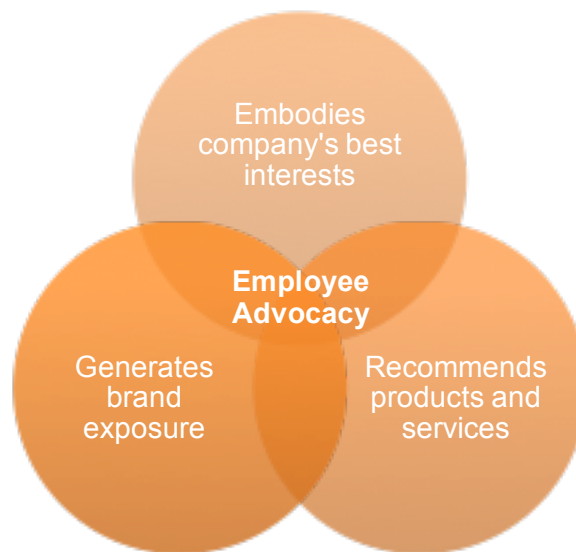


Figure 7. Employee advocacy in a nutshell. (Wasyluk 2015)

In short, company employees become the company's brand ambassadors in the digital marketplace. The chosen employees are volunteers who participate in marketing of a product or service while at the same time developing the company image in social media. (Puro 2014)

Micho Spring, Chair of Global Corporate Practice at Weber Shandwick states that in today's environment, there is lack of trust in all institutions and the employees are

increasingly the ones to build credibility and trust between the consumers and the organisations. Engaging the target audience through employees provides them with the best way to humanize and unify their enterprise voice and this is seen strategically crucial in today's business world. (2014)

Employee advocacy is seen as highly efficient in the market place;

1. The information spreads quickly. Through advocates, companies can reach the target market much quicker than through traditional broadcasting or through a company name.
2. It is effective. People will find messages from advocates far more interesting than messages from the company.
3. Contacting is easier. If the reader is interested and wants to hear more about a product, service or just wants to comment on something posted, the barrier is much smaller to contact and advocate through social media than it is to contact the company. (Siniaalto 2015)

To get advocates, a company must find individuals who agree with the company values and do not mind showing their personality to others. Authentic advocacy comes only from employees that have authentic excitement, authentic excitement comes from a good working environment. If the advocates do not agree with the company views and do not feel comfortable at work, they cannot serve as advocates. (Smarp<sup>2</sup>, 2016)

However, when putting the team together it is not enough that they share the company values; they have to be open to participating in the program. Employee advocacy cannot be forced by the employers because this will show through in social media. The advocate won't be passionate about the work, which can result in the posts and publications being half heartedly done with visible mistakes which shows lack of interest. If the advocate doesn't want the position the customer service offered online will also suffer, an advocate that doesn't want the position will not offer the same care to consumers a passionate advocate would. The advocacy must come from the employee and it must be genuine as that adds credibility. (Community Manager Appreciation <sup>3</sup>Day 2016)

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<sup>2</sup> Smarp is a company that created an employee advocacy program for employees to use. The platform is linked to social media channels; Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

<sup>3</sup> CMAD is an online group of community managers that organise online panels with selected managers. This panel's speakers were: Robert Brooks (Itim International), Jaana Nyström (Gplussa), Antonio Vieira (Atos), Jens Sundell (Smarp Oy), Hanna Takala (Zento)



After the advocate team is assembled, the team should be trained before starting their work. The advocates should understand fully the purpose and the concept of the program and they should be given all the material necessary to get started. Additional social media training should be offered to the advocates who feel it is necessary. The advocates should also be given clear guidelines; to not only protect the company's reputation but also to make it easier for the employees knowing what they can and cannot do. After the advocate team is informed, a launch strategy should be planned; there are two options, starting with a smaller scale program and growing the use over time or planning and executing a large-scale launch right away. The team should also choose on suitable platforms to be used in the program; all platforms should suit the company brand. To make sure the advocates feel motivated and appreciated, the company must create an incentive system to insure that the advocates are rewarded and encouraged. (Smarp, 2016)

Employee advocates should not be limited by too strict company rules and regulations. The program will not work if the company does not trust the employees to work as the "face" of the organisation. It is necessary to give some guidelines and advice on what to post and share in social media but otherwise the responsibility is on the advocate. It is important to support this and allow the advocates to show their own interests and fascinations. (CMAD 2016)

#### **2.4.2 Pros and cons of employee advocacy**

Employee advocacy brings the company visibility and brand recognition. In this digital age, almost all consumers are online which is why it is important that all companies are also. Increased visibility and brand recognition is hard to measure but one way to see is to look if the followers have increased on social media channels. The more followers you have the more visibility you gain; followers can re-post your posts, tweets or status updates which then their own followers will also see. (Hingemarketing 2015)

Employee advocacy brings inbound web traffic<sup>4</sup>, better search engine rankings<sup>5</sup>, increases content downloads and decreases marketing costs. Interesting posts in

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<sup>4</sup> Inbound web traffic are people coming on your website that can become prospects for the company.

<sup>5</sup>Search engine rankings refer to a position at which a website appears in the results of a search engine inquiry such as google.

social media bring more people onto their home site and people start searching online for more information about the products or services. ((Hingemarketing 2015)

Employee advocacy is personal and allows the advocates to reach out to their own networks. This means the company gets more followers than it would through its own network; the advocates followers are then also the company's followers. The personal network is beneficial in every department; an employee advocate who works in sales can find client prospects and an employee advocate working in human resources has an immediate applicant pool in reach. (CMAD 2016)

Not only does it benefit the company; the advocates also benefit from employee advocacy programs. It allows them to expand their own professional network, enables them to keep up with industry trends, allows them to develop their skills and knowledge, allows them to brand themselves as knowledgeable and professional and makes searching for new job positions easier. (CMAD 2016)

Employee advocacy also improves employee engagement and internal communication. The employees know better what is happening within the organisation and feel that they are part of it. A fully engaged employee advocate doesn't only work in social media, they unconsciously promote the organisation in person also. (CMAD 2016)

The negative side of employee advocacy is, that if the advocate posts something inappropriate for the company image or does another mistake, it is the company that damages from it as the advocate works as the face of the company. (CMAD 2016)

Employee advocacy however can have negative sides to it. If the advocates post anything inappropriate it can backlash on the company's image and brand. An example of a case like this is Finnair, a Finnish airline company, and Teri Niitti, a Finnish designer who did work for Finnair. Teri Niitti posted a picture on Instagram where a mother is breastfeeding a baby and wrote a comment that showed he disapproves public breastfeeding. Finnish consumers attacked Niitti in social media for this post and also wondered how Finnair can allow this kind of behaviour from people working for them. Finnair eventually had to release a comment that they do not approve behaviour like this and that they have nothing to do with Niitti's publications. (Kokko 2016)

As the literature review has shown, social media is an important platform for reaching people in employee advocacy and personal branding. The next section will go into the social media channels that can be used for both concepts.

## **2 Social media channels suitable for personal branding and employee advocacy**

There are various social media channels and new ones are being invented continuously. Social media channels are channels used for interaction; examples of social media channels are websites and applications for forums and social networking. Some channels are used within the country its invented in but the most used ones, such as Facebook and Twitter, are used worldwide.

It is necessary to do research on the company's target market to understand which channels would connect to the majority. However, personal branding and employee advocacy should happen on the channels the company employee's themselves use. The employee ought to be able to choose the channels so that they feel comfortable with it; however, they should take into consideration the target market they want to approach. (Smarp 2016)

This chapter will only introduce the most popular and frequently used social media channels as those carry the most significant importance when it comes to personal branding and employee advocacy.

### **3.1 Blogging**

A blog, short for web log, can be seen as a online diary that you allow others to read and comment on. It is an easy way to publish thoughts, ideas and insights. Nowadays it only requires a person to sign up for a blog platform and after this the writing can start. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

Blogging should be in the centre of a company's social media campaign. It's the collection of the company's knowledge, thoughts and opinions and in total it makes up the personal brand. A blog is the place to show and share the company accomplishments. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

The reasons why companies should use blogging in their social media campaign:

- Blogging is an easy way to market or sell a product or service because it allows the company to fully engage with the customers and help them make the buying decisions. The blog also allows for a creative way to showcase the products or services.
- Blogging allows the company to show their opinions and thoughts. It is a platform to stand on and publish thoughts.
- Blogging is an easy platform to share the passion the company runs with and to be part of a community.
- In overall it allows discussion between the company and the consumers. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

Companies should post two or three times a week at least. Anything less can make the company look like it cannot commit which affects the brand image. The content must be valuable and consistent. The important thing to remember is that the more you post the more search engines will find you. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

### **3.2 LinkedIn**

A LinkedIn profile is like an online résumé; it is a way to promote the professional side of your brand. It includes your skill sets, professional personality, knowledge and previous and current job positions. LinkedIn is used for connecting with other professionals and companies. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

For personal branding and employee advocates the ways to link their profile to their companies are the following;

- The profile picture should be the same than on the company website or have the company logo
- Your current job position should be linked to the company's LinkedIn profile
- Reposting and sharing the company's posts (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

### **3.3 Twitter**

Twitter is an online network with millions of users. It is a platform that allows the instantaneous sharing of blog posts and website content, which means companies can publish their opinions and ideas to potentially millions of readers. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

Content is what makes a brand and Twitter is the quickest and easiest way to share information and content to the consumers – thus creating the brand for the company. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

There are various benefits companies gain from Twitter:

- Companies can easily share blog posts and web pages
  - Companies can share their expertise online which works as marketing
  - Twitter allows for direct communication with customers and potential customers
  - Twitter is an easy platform to track competitors as all profiles are public
- (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

### **3.4 Facebook**

Facebook is a website that exists to help people connect and stay in touch with each other. Whereas LinkedIn is extremely professional, Facebook is more for personal use. Facebook is an easy platform to connect with the target market and its main purpose is to create a community element around the company brand. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

There are various reasons why companies should use Facebook for personal branding and employee advocacy:

- Facebook reaches millions of users instantly. Facebook has over 900 million users and by having a professional pages makes the company accessible.
- Facebook allows the company to develop community based relationships. Companies can post and share updates and news and repost interesting posts. Facebook makes it easy for the consumers to comment and ask about the company.
- Facebook advertising is seen by millions. Companies can pay to have their advertisements on the sidebar on Facebook. The company can choose themselves who to target the ads to and the ads are based on a pay-per-click mode of payment.
- Companies can use Facebook Analytics to gain insight. Only professional pages give the ability to use Facebook Insights application. It is used to gather metrics on the readers, such as which posts get the most reactions and when do users usually visit the page. It helps the company to understand and expand their follower base. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

For personal branding and employee advocacy the advocates can either create a new professional profile linked to their company or post from the company Facebook page. If the advocate works through the company's profile, it would require the company to adapt the page so that the consumers understand who the advocate is and it should be obvious to the consumers that the one posting is the advocate. (Deckers, Lacy 2011)

### **3.5 Instagram**

Instagram is a smartphone application for uploading photos and videos. A profile must be created and then the users can post photos and gain followers as well as follow other users. Instagram has over 300 million users. (Linkhumans 2015)

Instagram is important for companies because it allows them to easily showcase the company values, culture and staff – thus strengthens the brand. It allows for interaction between the company and the followers; engagement is high if you post photos and videos that provoke responses and create hashtags that you use in campaigns that allow users to also get involved. If a company manages to create a personal hashtag, the consumers using the product or service will start using the hashtag if they post about your company, bringing more followers to the company. (LinkHumans 2015)

### **3.6 Snapchat**

Snapchat is a new photo sharing application and one of the most popular ones in year 2015. The application allows the users to take photos and videos which they can send to selected friends. The photos and videos self destruct after a chosen time. Users can also post photos and videos on their "My story" which saves the posts for twenty-four hours. (LinkHumans 2015)

Creativity is essential for a company to succeed and companies must find new ways to attract customers and followers. Snapchat is only visual with creative features; it allows companies to brand themselves as creative. (LinkHumans 2015)

Additionally, Snapchat is a new social media platform for companies which means only around one percent of marketers are on Snapchat. It would be beneficial for a company to belong to this percentage. (LinkHumans 2015)

Snapchat, like other social media channels, allows for easy, instant engagement between the followers and the company. It is easy, simple as well as fun and entertaining to interact on Snapchat – thus lowering the barrier to engage with a company. (LinkHumans 2015)

Snapchat users' average age is between 13 to 25 years old, which is seen as a difficult market to target. Advocates that use Snapchat can reach a wider audience that they would otherwise reach. (LinkHumans 2015)

With Snapchat, advocates can show glimpses of how it is to work in the company, showcase events from preparation to the event itself and showcase new products or services but baring in mind that all posts should be honest yet catchy. (LinkHumans 2015)

### **3.7 Periscope**

Periscope is a smartphone application founded in 2014 and is seen as the newest, popular application to be used in marketing. Periscope is an application for real-time video feeds. (LinkHumans 2015)

Periscope allows for real-time interaction with customers. It also allows smaller companies to compete with larger ones for no expense. Periscope's user base is constantly growing meaning the company can gain a large follower base. Images and videos are said to be the future of marketing which is why companies should take Instagram and Periscope into their marketing strategy. (LinkHumans 2015)

Companies can post various things through Periscope but the following can help in employee advocacy:

- Posts from company events
  - Behind the scene pieces, showing the people working behind the brand
  - Presenting new products and services
  - Presenting industry news
  - Following other influencers
  - Showing clips from normal work days; creating a face for the brand
- (Linkhumans 2015)

### 3 Finnish market

From the 1980s marketing in Finland has been customer centred. Consumers were demanding better service and products and the motto was “consumers are always correct, even if they are wrong”. Companies were trying to differentiate themselves from competition and create sound communication with the consumer. From 1990 onwards, a more comprehensive, customer centred orientation began; based on the same principles as the previous orientation but now marketing was not a separate strategy, it was guiding the whole way of thinking in the operations. Here the customer is seen as the king. (Savo Consortium for Education 2000)

The traditional marketing methods used in Finland before the digital age were print, TV and radio as well as banners. Nowadays, these methods are still used but combined with online marketing to target a larger consumer group. Social media has become important in marketing and is already a norm in marketing strategies in Finland. (Finnish Search engine masters 2016) (Halme 2015)

Finnish social media experts listed various trends that we can expect in year 2016 in Finnish social media marketing;

- Content marketing will lead media strategies, complete focus on authentic content based marketing planning. (Jokinen 2015)
- Videos and photographs are a norm in social media marketing. (Rehn 2015)
- Live streaming will be even more popular. (Valtari 2015)
- Employee advocacy will continue growing and company logos and sites on certain platforms will continue to become less important. (Santalo 2015)
- Marketing will continue to be automatized in social media channels, requiring companies to stay alert that they do not drown consumers with posts. (Taponen 2015)
- Quality content replaces amount; understanding the need to only post quality material rather than pushing messages and content to every social media channel. (Leino 2015)

As social media has now been implemented completely to the marketing strategy; companies are trying to figure out which platforms are most valuable to the consumers nowadays. Kurio states, based on their research, that the most interesting and current social media platforms are Snapchat, Periscope and Facebook Live, however the older



platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter are still popular and should not be forgotten. (2015)

#### **4 Research Methods**

There are three types of research methods; exploratory, descriptive and explanatory studies. (Saunders 2009)

The objective of exploratory studies is to answer the question what is happening and to seek new insights. It is flexible and allows for changes meaning that the researcher must be willing to change the direction of the study as the results appear. The principal ways of conducting an exploratory research is a search of literature, interviewing an expert or conducting group interviews. (Saunders 2009)

The aim of descriptive research is to describe a precise profile of people, events or situations. Often it is used as a piece of exploratory and more often a piece of explanatory research. When using a descriptive research, it is necessary to have a clear image of the phenomena before starting the data collection. (Saunders 2009)

Explanatory research studies a situation or a problem to help understand the relationship between variables. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection can be used. (Saunders 2009)

This thesis uses exploratory research studies; it seeks to explore and understand employee advocacy and personal branding specifically in Finland. An interview with an expert will be conducted to further the literature search. This research method is broad and does not give an definite answer to the research topic. (Saunders 2009)

##### **5.1 Research strategy**

The overall research strategy in this thesis is qualitative because qualitative research gives more descriptive insight which is why it suits this research. The qualitative research goes more into depth providing descriptive results of an event or phenomena where as quantitative research explains an event or phenomena in numerical models. (Merriam 2014)

Quantitative research focuses on measurements and amounts, and usually requires closed “yes or no” styled questions to gain hard facts and statistics. A larger group is interviewed to get reliable statistics. This research method is reliable and gives valid information however for this research topic this method is not descriptive and open enough. Qualitative research, especially the semi-structured interview used in this thesis, allows for more descriptive answers. The following chapter explains more about qualitative research methods. (Merriam 2014)

The research will be based on a semi-structured interview with a Finnish travel agency, Finnmatkat. The interview is conducted to see how marketing has adapted in Finland and how Finnish companies use employee advocacy and personal branding nowadays. Finnmatkat is the Finnish branch of TUI Nordic, Northern Europe’s largest travel agency. Finnmatkat has been one of the leading travel agencies in Finland for many years due to their marketing and branding strategies. Now they have adapted social media platforms and employee advocacy into their strategy which is why they have valuable insight on the marketing and branding operations in Finland.

## **5.2 Qualitative approach**

Kvale defines the qualitative approach as an interview method which purpose is to collect descriptions of the interviewees opinions and point of view regarding the understanding of the described phenomena. Meaning that the purpose of all qualitative researches is to look at a research topic from the perspective of the interviewee and understanding how and why they have this perspective. (Kvale cited in Cassel, Symon 2004)

Qualitative research attempts to understand situations in their distinctiveness as part of a specific context and the interactions within the context. It does not try to predict what may happen in the future, but tries to understand the current setting. Qualitative research answers questions such as why, what and how. (Merriam 2014)

One key feature of qualitative research is the relationship between the research interviewee and interviewer. In qualitative research the interviewee is seen more as a participant that can shape the interview when in quantitative research the interviewees are seen as the subjects of the interview that cannot shape the interview. (Cassel, Symon 2004)

The qualitative semi-structured interviews chosen for this research provide the opportunity to ask questions that require explaining and describing. It has structured questions but allows to adapt and follow up with additional questions. This semi-structured method can bring more depth into the research which is why it was chosen for this research. (Merriam 2014)

### **5.3 Data reliability**

The lack of standardisation in qualitative, semi-structured, interviews can lead to concerns about reliability. This is due to the fact that the structure can change and the results can vary depending on when the interview is placed and who is the interviewee. The other concerns are related to the bias; there are a couple types of bias in this case.

1. Interviewer bias, where comments, tone or non-verbal behaviour of the interviewer creates bias by moulding the responds of the interviewee.
2. Response bias can be cause by perceptions towards the interviewer or the case that the interviewee may be willing to participate but might be sensitive to certain areas of the interview. (Saunders 2009)

A response to the issue of reliability is that the findings from a qualitative research are not intended to be repeatable in the future as the research reflects how the situation is at the time the data is collected. As the research topic in this thesis is likely to continue developing; it is safe to assume the data collected will also change. (Saunders 2009)

## **5 Results**

### **6.1 Traditional marketing and branding**

Traditional marketing and branding are both crucial strategies for companies that want to succeed in the competitive marketplace, as already stated in section 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. Marketing and branding are practices that allow companies to stay in the consumers' minds and differentiate themselves from competition. All marketing and branding strategies are different, especially when comparing strategies from different countries. Finnmatkat's social media expert, Anni Aarni states traditional marketing and branding in Finland as campaigns and company communication that aim to adapt how the

consumers and the target market see the company. Aarni states that the only way in Finland to compare each other with competition to see who was successful was to look which companies were mostly on top of the mind of consumers as well as which brands were mostly preferred.

In Finland, like in other countries, a company that has marketed itself well and has a strong brand has added value. Finnish companies that have strong brand images and creative marketing strategies survive better in the market place than companies with weaker marketing and branding. The traditional marketing and branding strategies in Finland were done through retailers, print media (advertisements, catalogues and brochures), outdoor advertising (billboards), face-to-face (shops, exhibitions and meetings), events and through telephone. Finnmatkat used all of the above before the digital times, allowing them to stay as one of the leading tour operators in Finland.

Finland has always come a little bit behind in marketing and branding and seems to copy what happens in the rest of Europe and the US. However, since traditional marketing had become strong, branding was starting to be taken seriously also and was fully integrated into Finnmatkat's marketing strategy. Branding has been an important strategy for Finnmatkat as they see that they benefit from it increasingly due to the fact that strong branding allows for positive effects on word of mouth, brand preference leading eventually to higher sales.

Aarni emphasizes that not only the companies in Finland benefit from creative marketing and a strong brand but also the consumers and the target market. However, the stronger the brand is the more likely it is that the consumer will benefit from it. The main benefits of strong brands for consumers is the assurance that the product is good quality and will serve you as it is advertised and also the image the consumers gain when they use the products.

Finnmatkat wanted to make sure during the traditional marketing period that they stood out from competition and were the first choice as a brand when it came to travelling outside of Finland. Finnmatkat invested time and money to show their brand image in all marketing material and communication methods. They stayed visible to the consumers constantly and tried to bring up new creative sides to their campaigns.

## **6.2 Digital Marketing and Branding**

The world wide web (www) became more commonly used in Finland in late 1990s as households began using it for private uses. During these years marketing started slowly changing and by the millennium, digital marketing had increased and had started to become more a norm. Finnmatkat states that they followed closely with the trends; when digital marketing became more popular they adapted quickly to the changes. Aarni emphasizes that Finnmatkat quickly took on new marketing methods and concentrated on their strategy and planning more as the focus was changed towards digital marketing.

However, digital marketing and branding does not replace traditional marketing and branding and Finnmatkat tries to handle both methods equally. To make sure they succeed in traditional and digital strategies; they market themselves through different online channels, public relations, print media and social media channels. Aarni repeats what most modern marketers state; marketing and branding work hand in hand with each other, meaning that all sales communications and media publications should match as it all effects the brand image.

## **6.2 Personal Branding**

Many organisations in Finland had started adapting personal branding into their marketing strategies many years ago, yet employee advocacy has only made its way to marketing during these last years. Finnmatkat emphasizes that it has been necessary to conduct personal branding for many years now also for them.

Finnmatkat has used Finnish celebrities and their brands to advertise themselves, allowing them to target certain groups (See figure 9). However, for Finnmatkat it is not about celebrity endorsements, but using their own employees as well as managers to work as the “face” of the company. Aarni states that in their case, they always encourage employees to create own content for Finnmatkat to use as well as to share on their own channels. Finnmatkat also coaches management and the company experts in bringing out their knowledge also outside of work through social media channels, events and seminars.



**Finnmatkat** @Finnmatkat · 11. huhtikuuta

Tiistaina 12.4. @rikurantala Facebook-chatissa. Aiheena #Albania ja omatoimiloma. [fal.cn/2SrP](https://fal.cn/2SrP)



1



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Figure 9. A screenshot of Finnmatkat's Twitter post, featuring a Finnish celebrity Riku Rantala.

Finnmatkat finds that it has been highly beneficial for them to have employees and managers doing personal branding for the company. Aarni believes that people have always been more keen on talking and listening to other people, rather than the organisations; allowing for personal branding to reach the target market and the consumers much better. Personal branding also makes the company look more interesting for consumers as well as for people searching for work; Finnmatkat is constantly trying to find creative ways to connect with people and personal branding gives them the opportunity.

Finnmatkat find that personal branding can also have negative effects on the company and the company image, like stated in section 2.4.3. Aarni states that Finnmatkat is careful not to make the company's actions too personalised. Their services are suitable for everyone requiring that their brand doesn't become too specific. Aarni states that recently Finnmatkat has also realised that personal branding makes communication

more difficult in crisis situations. Recently Finnmatkat was caught in a scandal which involved the insurance company Allianz and their seriously ill customer. Finnmatkat's and Allianz's insurance did not cover the customer's healthcare due to the level of illness and the fact that it did not belong to their insurance coverage. The family used social media help get the relative back, resulting in a social media scandal towards Finnmatkat and Allianz. As Finnmatkat has employees working as personal brands and representing them, not only did the company get contacts but the contacts were also distributed towards individuals. This makes communication more difficult because the crisis was for Finnmatkat, not for individual employees who might not have the experience and knowledge to deal with a situation like this.

Aarni believes, that even though personal branding has disadvantages, the benefits are much larger and due to this she emphasizes that Finnish companies should all adapt personal branding into their marketing strategies.

### **6.3 Employee Advocacy**

Employee advocacy has become an important strategy in marketing for Finnish companies during the last year. Finnmatkat has also noticed the importance and the reaction employee advocacy has received from Finnish consumers and has actively adapted it into their marketing. Finnmatkat especially benefits from employee advocacy as they have employees around the world and it is a great way to show the consumers how they work outside of Finland also.

In Finnmatkat's case, the employee advocacy is most obvious in Instagram and Snapchat as the employees post on Finnmatkat's main account. The posts involve presentations of holiday locations and introductions to the employee advocates. Not only do the posts give an idea what it is like to work for Finnmatkat, but it also showcases the locations Finnmatkat offers and gives the consumers the possibility of contacting the advocates through the channels. As seen in figure 8, when consumers comment on the publication, asking questions or commenting on the photo and location, the advocates always present an answer; which makes every commenter feel valuable to Finnmatkat.

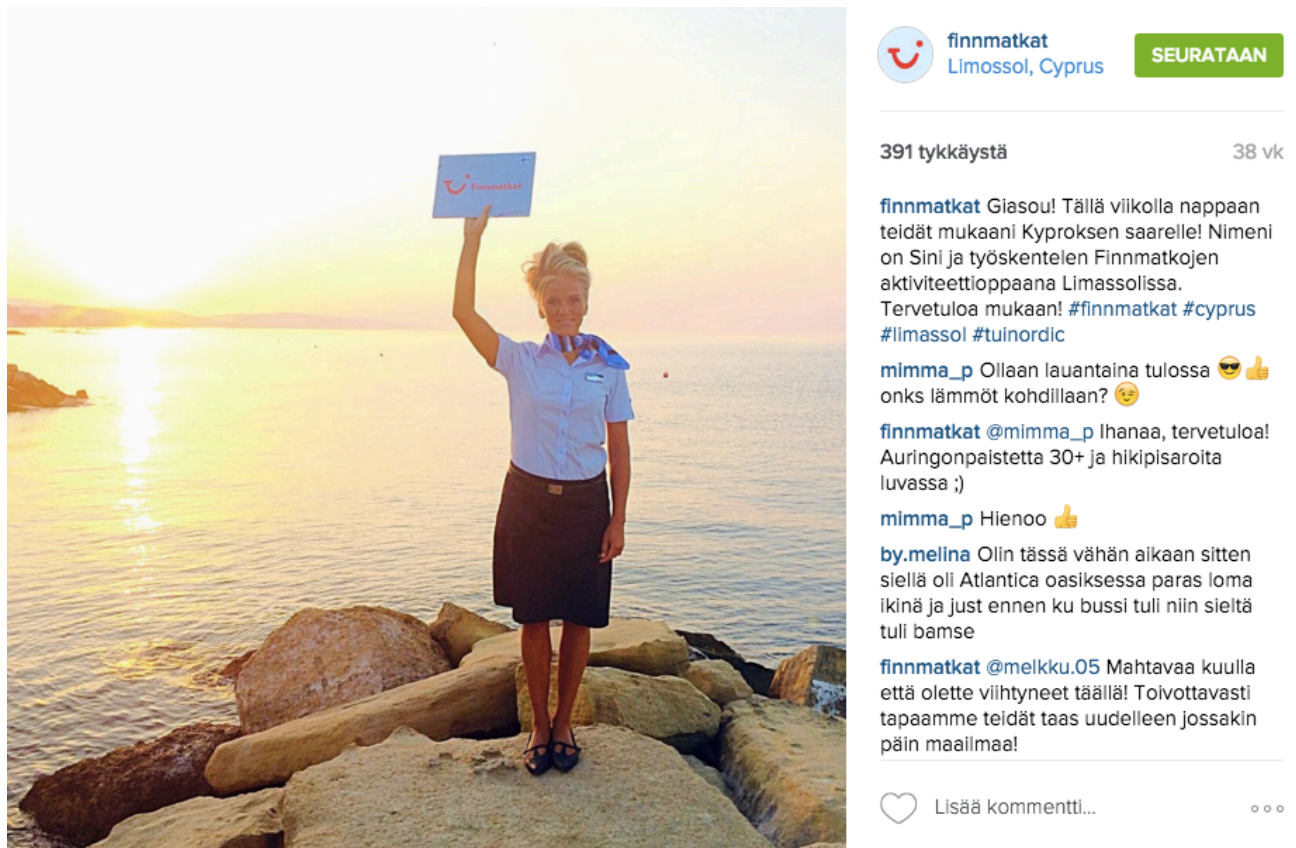


Figure 8. Screenshot of Finnmatkat's Instagram post which was done by an advocate.

Finnmatkat also picks a team of advocates to operate on the company's Facebook page. Assisting the consumers and posting about the holiday destinations, special deals and news that can affect the holiday locations. Rather than having one person as the "face" of the company they choose to have a whole team, allowing the consumers to get quicker service. As can be seen on figure 10, Facebook, just like Instagram, is used frequently by consumers for questions and commenting.

The benefits from employee advocates working straight from the company's profiles are that the consumers have a lowered barrier to contact the company. Calling a company takes always time as you end up waiting in line to get hold of the customer service and emails have the image of being slower for gaining contact. By contacting the advocates straight on the company profiles, they just have to write a post or comment and wait for the advocates to react within the day.



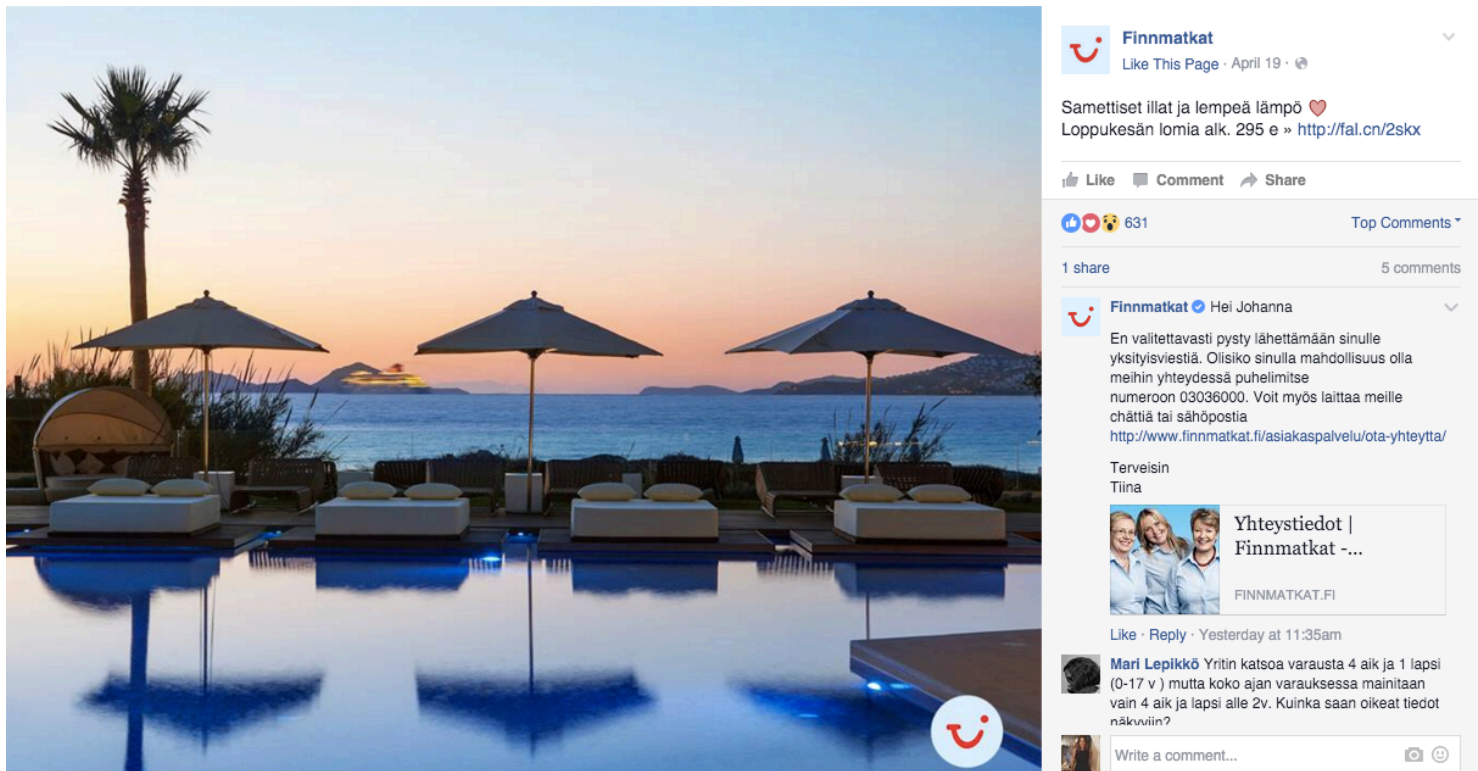


Figure 10. A screenshot of Finnmatkat's Facebook post.

Aarni states that Finnmatkat also encourages employees to work as advocates on their private accounts online as well as in person outside of work. As explained in section 2.4.2, by allowing advocates to use their private profiles, the company gains a larger reader base; instead of just the company's network, the posts are also seen by the advocates own network which can be double the size of the company's. Finnmatkat emphasizes the importance of the advocates showing their industry and knowledge in their own channels, as it benefits both Finnmatkat and themselves. Aarni explains that currently the most frequently used channels for the advocates are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

To ensure that the advocates endorse Finnmatkat in the best possible way; Finnmatkat chooses its advocates by their employees' own wants, interests and based on their needs and knowledge. No one is forced to become an advocate at Finnmatkat, ensuring that all the advocates enjoy their position full heartedly. When the advocates are chosen, they are informed on what type of content is suitable for Finnmatkat and trained on the channels and their specific strategies and approaches. When advocates want to use their private accounts on social media, Finnmatkat offers coaching and assistance if needed.

In Finnmatkat's case, they have benefitted from employee advocacy because it has brought additional visibility online as well as at seminars, at industry forums and communication has also become more authentic between the company and the consumers. Aarni believes that Finnmatkat only benefits from employee advocacy and doesn't see that Finnmatkat could suffer from it as they are trained on what they can and cannot post. No one is forced to become an advocate as showing one's face for a company does not suit everyone, and pushing one to do so could result in unauthentic posts and worse customer service. However, a common ground should be found on the communication styles and a line must be drawn on what topics can be touched and what not.

Aarni emphasizes that all companies in Finland should adopt employee advocacy into their marketing scheme as people trust other people better than the company itself and the messages speak out more to the consumers. Well done employee advocacy can end up raising the customer base, the company image as well as sales.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis was conducted in order to research if Finnish companies could benefit from employee advocacy and personal branding. To fully understand this topic, the basis of marketing was examined as well as how personal branding and employee advocacy works in companies.

To gain full knowledge of the subject, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and to understand how Finnish companies react to the new marketing strategies, an interview was conducted with Finnmatkat.

Personal branding is developing a certain feeling that you want others to experience when they see or hear something online or in real life. Employee advocacy is having company employees promoting and representing the company online and in person. The employees should do it voluntarily as that gives the best results, however in all cases it is not like this. Finnmatkat uses both personal branding and employee advocacy frequently both online and offline, however the online side is in higher importance nowadays. Personal branding and employee advocacy became crucial in Finnmatkat's online marketing strategy after social media became popular in Finland and most of the target market was reachable through social media channels.

Now Finnmatkat has personal brands and advocates online on social media channels, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Periscope. These channels were chosen due to the popularity in Finland and the network base they could contact through them. All channels allow for video and photo material, which in Finnmatkat's case is crucial as photos and videos are the best way to market travel destinations. The personal brands and advocates also work in person; joining industry seminars, events and exhibitions.

By comparing the literature review and the results from the interview with Finnmatkat, it is obvious that both personal branding and employee advocacy are fully implemented to companies marketing strategies and should be taken seriously also in Finland. Finland is a little bit behind when it comes to adopting new marketing methods but Aarni states that both personal branding and employee advocacy are crucial nowadays and that most companies have already implemented them during the last year and the results can be seen. In Finnmatkat's case they have gained more visibility and followers, they are more authentic to the consumers and make communication easier between them and the consumers.

This research shows that Finnish companies should benefit from personal branding and employee advocacy if they put the time and effort into doing it well. Finnmatkat is a great example, as they are still in the process of both yet they have already benefitted from it. Finnmatkat has gained more followers on social media, expanded their customer base and strengthened their position on the Finnish market. Even though the literature review, as well as the data collection, showed some risks for both methods, the benefits are still larger for companies.

For companies that are seeking to work with employee advocacy and personal branding, there are some tips to consider. The employees should never be forced to work as advocates for the company as their material will not look genuine to the consumers. Also, the advocates should not be restricted too much; as Aarni states, restricting will not allow the company to succeed and some small mistakes will not bring down the company image necessarily. Another valuable tip would be not to take on too many channels; it is better to choose which to use and concentrate on publishing quality content rather than looking at the quantity.

As the research topic is fairly new and still changing and also broad, as it can be studied from the company's, employee's and consumers point of view, new researches

should be conducted. This thesis was conducted to answer how personal branding and employee advocacy works and if Finnish companies could benefit from it. The research topic was answered, yet the substance is bound to change due to technology developments and consumer behaviour. Because the subject is fairly new and the developments in the industry, there is still need for further researching. As the time to conduct interviews for this research was cut short, the recommendation would be to also interview Finnmatkat's advocates to gain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena and how it works in Finland from the point of view of the employees.

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